

OC 24-69: 2023 Kansas City Reunion After Action Report

Prepared by Brian Flora with Input from the Planning Group



Overview of OC 24-69's Reunion Process

On August 1, 1969, 161 men of 50th Company Infantry OCS (OC 24-69) graduated from the six-month long and very rigorous (i.e., “Old School”) Infantry OCS Course at Fort Benning, Georgia. We parted ways. Some of us were able to stay in touch, at least for a while, but the large majority scattered and got on with the rest of their lives. Starting in 2015, through a persistent and remarkably successful internet-driven search effort, all

but around twenty were accounted for. Those who were able were encouraged to reconnect with their former 50th Company comrades. The goal was to have a reunion.

The logical venue choice for a first reunion was **Fort Benning, Georgia**, the scene of our OCS training “ordeal.” In October 2017, fifty-three classmates, most of whom came with spouses, gathered in Columbus, Georgia for the first OC 24-69 reunion. Fort Benning and its current OCS program rolled out the red carpet for us. Many who attended (including most of the spouses) didn’t know what to expect, and some of us were skeptical that serious bonding could take place among a group that had, over the past fifty years, gone in so many different directions. They were wrong. It was a hugely successful event, both entertaining and, in many cases, heart-warming. As the Benning reunion concluded, we determined that we must have another.

Comment: the **Benning Reunion** was existential. Without it, the Washington DC, Gettysburg, and Kansas City reunions would not have happened. The initial inspiration and drive shown by a handful of classmates (Thank you!) in their search for their long-lost 50th Company classmates brought us back together. We began to communicate and share our stories with each other. This resulted in the publication of a chronicle of the company, “*The Men of 50th Company OCS*,” and finally led to a fantastic and memorable reunion at Benning. We reconnected and started the re-bonding process.

The **Washington DC Reunion** was a perfect segue. It was more “official” and dignified than the Benning experience. Thirty-eight classmates, most accompanied by spouses, came together to build on our renewed friendships that had begun at Benning. We remembered our missing comrades at a moving sunset ceremony at the Vietnam Memorial and paid tribute to our nation’s fallen soldiers with a 50th Company wreath at Arlington National Cemetery’s Tomb of the Unknowns. We also had a tour of the Senate, House of Representatives, and the Library of Congress. Our formal gala banquet at the venerable Army-Navy Club was unforgettable. We reflected on how the OCS experience had helped shape us as individuals. The reunion was an experience that none of us will ever forget, and it set the stage for our wonderful Gettysburg experience three years later.

Gettysburg, Pennsylvania was the venue for our third reunion. Despite the delay caused by Mr. COVID, September 2022 saw 50th Company back in formation on the hallowed battlefield at Gettysburg, Pennsylvania. Thirty-two classmates and twenty-four spouses gathered at the Gettysburg Hotel. Spirits were high, and a wonderful time was had by all. The Planning Group Committee wanted a relaxed atmosphere and built unprogrammed time into the schedule with time set aside for just chilling and enjoying each other’s company. This resulted in additional bonding and a strengthening of our friendships. The programmatic highlight of the reunion was Monday’s guided bus tour of the Battlefield that ended with a visit to the Gettysburg Museum and Cyclorama.

That evening the Banquet Dinner was held in the hotel's ballroom. It began with a cocktail hour and class photos, during which interviews with classmates were being taped in an adjacent bank vault for future viewing. Seating at the dinner was open, the food was great, and the banquet program was entertaining. Thank you, Scott and Lou. The following day, an optional guided tour of the nearby home and farm of President and Mamie Eisenhower was offered.

And that Said, Here Is How Our Kansas City Reunion Played Out:

Sunday, SEPTEMBER 24, 2023: Arrival and Registration

The four-star Kansas City InterContinental Hotel, with its Rooftop Ballroom and Lounge overlooking the city, was the most "elegant" facility we have yet chosen for a 50th Company reunion. Located in the downtown "Plaza" area of the city (think Hispanic-themed red tiled roofs, beautiful fountains, shopping, and restaurants), the InterContinental was close to the city's tourist sites and had every amenity we needed.

The 50th Company's Reunion Registration table was located in a hospitality room provided gratis for us on the second floor. Members of the Reunion Planning Team, accompanied by their spouses, welcomed new arrivals, answered questions, and handed out welcome packets with ID badges, reunion schedules, the list of attendees, and colored post-its indicating banquet meal entrée selections.

The room remained reserved for us during the rest of the reunion for informal meetings among reunion attendees. Snacks and non-alcoholic beverages were provided, and classmates and spouses were encouraged to mix and engage with one another. The hotel "saloon" (The American Slang Lounge) was open and inviting and saw good patronage from thirsty classmates who, if they wanted, could bring their libations up to the hospitality suite.

The buffet breakfast each morning was covered by the reunion fee. The hotel provided a private breakfast space (the Brookside Dining Area) which offered a wonderful opportunity to mix and mingle. There was no formal group dinner on Sunday, so attendees gathered in small groups and headed out to local restaurants. Nobody went hungry.

Except for the Reunion Banquet on Monday evening, there was no formal reunion program. Classmates and spouses were free to arrange their own activities, individually or (preferably) in groups. A slight majority of the classmates had cars, so those without "wheels" simply checked around and until they found a ride. The two-hour breakfasts provided a wonderful opportunity to meet with classmates and spouses, talk, and to sort things out.

Monday, September 25, 2023: Suggested morning tour of the Harry S. Truman Library and Museum

On Monday Morning, Brian Flora arranged for a guided tour of the Truman Library, Museum and Grave in nearby Independence, Missouri. We sorted out car-pooling assignments and headed out at 9:30. Brian had asked, if possible, for a volunteer docent who was a military veteran. We wound up with “Kurt,” who, it turns out, had flown Hueys in Vietnam at the same time we were deployed there. He gave us a most interesting and inspiring tour of the museum and shared meaningful insights about one of America’s most unlikely and underrated Presidents. In retrospect, the country is lucky to have had Truman “stopping the buck” during very difficult times. There was no pre-arranged lunch for the whole reunion group, but most of those on the Truman tour joined Brian and Kay at a quaint and fun place they found near the museum. It was appropriately called “*The Little BBQ Joint.*”

Monday Evening, SEPTEMBER 25, Banquet and Program in the Rooftop Ballroom and Bar.

We started off with a 5:00 PM Cocktail Hour (hosted bar) in the InterContinental Rooftop Lounge, adjacent to the Ballroom area where we dined. The views of the city were spectacular. The Cocktail Hour continued as we gathered for group photos. The first group photo was of classmates only (no Platoon photos), followed by a group photo of classmates plus spouses and guests. The open bar stayed open until 7:00 when we took our seats in the dining area. The seating was open.

At 7:00 PM the Pre-Dinner Program began with a hearty welcome from Lou Lallo, Reunion Planning Group Chair, who introduced the “Missing Man Table.” The “Missing Man Table” video, provided by Scott Davis, helped us honor classmates who are no longer with us. 50th Company Padre, Mike Eberhardt, as he always does, delivered an eloquent and moving invocation and blessing. This was followed by a 50th Company Toast by Peter Nowlan, who commented on the many ways our classmates served their country and communities after their military service.

7:30 PM: Dinner was Served. It was delicious.

9:00 – 10:00 PM: The Evening Program began with comments by Brian Flora who discussed why 50th Company’s military service during the Vietnam War Era mattered. (Basically, we hung in there and helped win the Cold War.) This was followed by a Scott Davis video entitled “Finding Anecdotal Humor In Vietnam,” that got everyone chuckling. Scott’s last video, the “First Ever 50th Company Awards Ceremony” featured a FUBAR Award to Craig Biggs for his performance as platoon point man

during the OCS middle-of-the-night Ranger exercise. Craig distinguished himself in the pitch blackness by walking off a cliff. FUBAR! Go for it!!!

Lou Lallo closed the evening with a round of Thank-Yous. He then introduced 50th Company Poet Laureate Brian Walrath, who read his most recent poem, “50th (Company) at 50,” which expresses the sentiment that has been generated by our reunions: It ended with: “... As you tally up the scorecard at the end... But when the game is through... I’ll stand among those lucky few... Who can say that we had old soldiers for good friends.” Thank you to Brian Walrath.

Tuesday, SEPTEMBER 26, Optional Visit to the National World War One Museum

Almost everyone participated in the visit to the National WWI Museum, organized by Brian Walrath. Those without wheels easily found rides from the hotel. The museum is huge and tries to share the stories of the “War to End All Wars” through the eyes of those who lived it. Interactive displays, thought-provoking films, and eyewitness testimonies help guide visitors through many facets and aspects of the conflict. Most of us spent over two hours wandering through the exhibits trying to make sense of the senseless horror that was WWI. For lunch some gathered at the Museum’s cafeteria, the “Over There Café.”

During the afternoon, everyone was free to arrange their own activities and visit tourist sites that appealed to them. Kay noticed a number of the ladies out and about in the beautiful Plaza shopping area across from the hotel. One group of classmates went to the Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art with its fine, eclectic collection of art. They weren’t disappointed. Dinner arrangements were up to the individual attendees. As has become a tradition at 50th Company reunions, the Reunion Planning Group dined together on the last evening. We went to “Seasons 52,” a block from the Hotel. The prix-fixe four-course menu (with three choices of entrees) was wonderful!

Wednesday Morning, SEPTEMBER 27, Farewell and Departure

We gathered at 7:00 for our final breakfast in the Brookside Breakfast Area. Some classmates had to hit the road early, but they stayed for the first hour. The conversations were lively and expressed heartfelt appreciation for the warm camaraderie that the 50th Company, classmates and spouses, continue to build. It is just great to be together. Many comments focused on how we should get together next year for one more “last” reunion. The clear consensus was that we should continue to

meet annually as long as we are able to pull it off. So, the Planning group will begin Zoom-meeting again in October to explore options for another gathering.

Classmates and spouses said their good-byes and wished safe travels. Hugs were exchanged, and the Brookside Breakfast Room slowly emptied.

See you next year!

Brian and Kay

Kansas City, Missouri September 24- 27, 2023 Reunion Attendees

Bill Adams (1st PLT)
Craig Biggs (5th PLT) and Jill
Don Cramer (3rd PLT)
Scott Davis (5th PLT)
Jim Durkin (2nd PLT)
Mike Eberhardt (2nd PLT) and Robin
Brian Flora (4th PLT) and Kay Kuhlman
Chuck Granner (3rd PLT) and Sherry
Bob Hines (2nd PLT) and MaryAnn
Terry Hummel (6th PLT) and Wanda
Louis Lallo (3rd PLT) and Suzie
Gary List (1st PLT) and Jill
Bob Myers (6th PLT)
Peter Nowlan (2nd PLT) and Kathy
Charles Oliver (Arty OC11-70) and Susan
Steve Porter (3rd PLT) and Phyllis
Bill Snodgrass (2nd PLT) and Debbie
Ken Sutton (6th PLT) and Debbie
Bill Thoroughgood (2nd PLT) and Joy
Brian Walrath (2nd PLT) and Dace
James Zack (2nd PLT) and Yvonne